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IN THE EARLIER YEARS OF LITERARY STUDY

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Often we wonder what a high-school child ought to get from his study of literature besides the mere story. It is vain indeed to expect him to master any of the finer points of technique, or to analyze an author's style. "The nervous writing," "the tropical phrases" of certain artists will mean nothing to the high-school pupils. There are, however, points of form which even eighth-grade children will learn to recognize and delight in, and sometimes to use. These matters of form which can be taught to the high-school student should be graded according to his interests and capabilities. *Enoch Arden* and *Sohrab and Rustum* may be read with profit either in the eighth or the twelfth year; but the points of attack will be utterly different. The eighth-grade child will get the story, the figures of speech, and other clever expressions such as "the idle gossips of the port," but he will utterly lose what the twelfth-grade student sees—the real tragedy of Enoch's life, the depth of Philip's tact, the cause of Annie's constant helplessness, the pathos of Rustum's victory, the fineness of Sohrab in the hour of death. To the older student there is experience in lines like these:

> For we are all, like swimmers in the sea;
> Poised on the top of a huge wave of fate,
> Which hangs uncertain to which side to fall;
> And whether it will heave us up to land,
> Or whether it will roll us out to sea,—
> Back out to sea, to the deep waves of death,—
> We know not, and no search will make us know:
> Only the event will teach us in its hour.

The older student finds, too—what the child misses—the gray mood in the opening description of each poem, a mood which colors the whole story; the shifting responsibility for the slaying of Sohrab; the inherent weakness in each character which made the

tragedy inevitable. In planning the English course, therefore, we must decide carefully not only where we shall use the material, but what we shall expect it to yield in the place to which we have assigned it.

Eighth-grade children are highly sensory. They have keen eyes and ears. In the study of literature they will respond with pleasure to sounds, to sights, to colors. The material selected for their reading should therefore be rich in sensory interest. Among the best classics from this standpoint are *The Lays of Ancient Rome*, for here are simple examples of the best literary devices. There are frequent interior rhymes, loved by all children. In promising his aid to Horatius, Lartius says:

Lo, I will stand at thy right hand,
And keep the bridge with thee,

and Herminius inspired by the same courage, cries:

I will abide at thy right side,
And keep the bridge with thee.

Such rhymes always delight the child, and he will catch them in his following years of study, for they occur in *The Ancient Mariner:*

The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,
And southward aye we fled.

Again in *The Princess:*

The splendor falls on castle walls
And snowy summits old in story;
The long light shakes across the lakes,
And the wild cataract leaps in glory.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying;
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

Then from one of Buchanan Reade's poems:

My soul today is far away,
Sailing the Vesuvian Bay;
My winged boat, a bird afloat,
Swims round the purple peaks remote.

Rhymed poetry is full of this device.

Because the children are warned against using the same word over and over again, they frequently misunderstand and feel that

any repetition is undesirable. If their attention is called to such re-use of words as Macaulay often finds effective, they will see that there is a distinction between repetitions that are careless, accidental, and those that are deliberate, intentional. For those skilful repetitions, children will enjoy watching, and they will respect the force of such examples as they find in *Horatius at the Bridge:*

And droves of mules and asses,
  Laden with skins of wine,
And endless flocks of goats and sheep,
  And endless herds of kine,
And endless trains of wagons
  That creaked beneath the weight
Of corn-sacks and of household goods,
  Choked every roaring gate.

This device is quite as effective in prose as in poetry:

What is to be thought of the poor shepherd girl from the hills and forests of Lorraine, that—like the Hebrew shepherd boy from the hills and forests of Judea—rose suddenly out of the quiet, out of the safety, out of the religious inspiration, rooted in deep pastoral solitudes, to a station in the van of armies, and to the more perilous station at the right hand of kings?

—Thomas DeQuincey, *Joan of Arc*

The catastrophe of this splendid drama is at hand. What actors are met! Two races, that of merchants and mariners, that of laborers and soldiers; two nations, the one dominant by gold, the other by steel; two republics, the one theocratic, the other aristocratic. Rome and Carthage! Rome with her army, Carthage with her fleet; Carthage, old, rich and crafty—Rome, young, poor, robust; the past and the future; the spirit of discovery and the spirit of conquest; the genius of commerce and the demon of war; The East and South on one side, the West and North on the other; in short, two worlds,—the civilization of Africa and the civilization of Europe.—Hugo.

Very early the child will begin to imitate—amateurishly, of course—this skilful, intentional, re-use of words. In the later years of study, he will enjoy the good repetition of DeQuincey and Hugo, because he was early trained to enjoy them.

Repeated lines that come as a refrain into the poems of Macaulay and others will please children as a chorus delights them in singing. The words in *Horatius*, "in the brave days of

old," come back from time to time with unfailing pleasure to the child. He learns to watch for thrice-repeated lines like

Plainly and more plainly

or

Today the dead are living;
The lost are found today.

As the child's reading is broadened, he will find this same refrain in poems like *Œnone*, where with only slight variations one line occurs eighteen times:

Dear Mother Ida, hearken ere I die.

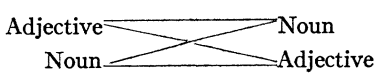
Such a device is not confined to poetry. It occurs in Patrick Henry's speeches; it occurs in much of our oratorical and lyric prose.

Very closely akin to refrains, beloved like them, are repeated appellations. Joyfully indeed do the children read again and again of "the purple Appenines," "the yellow Tiber," "Proud Tusculum," "the Dauntless Three," "False Sextus that wrought the deed of shame," and "Tusculum Mamilius, Prince of the Latian name." A study of these oft-repeated appellations will make the child in his later reading understand Dickens' fondness for this very device.

The old Roman masterpieces are full of a queer trick of order which we find occasionally in our English literature—chiasmus. It is a good trick, if skilfully used, and one which children like to try. *The Lays of Ancient Rome* furnish several examples of it:

Nought spake he to Lars Porsena,
To Sextus nought spake he.
. . . . . .
Back darted Spurius Lartius;
Herminius darted back:
. . . . . .
Red with gore their armor was,
Their steeds were red with gore.
. . . . . .
White as snow their armor was;
Their steeds were white as snow.

In the first line of the example given above, the adjective comes first; and in the second, the noun is first. Should we graph it, we should have something of this sort:



Connecting the parallel elements, we find a cross, as a symbol of which the Greeks used their letter χ. Hence we call this the cross or chiastic order. This device, because it is a little artificial and therefore dangerous unless in the hands of an artist, is not found frequently in any one piece of literature; but the child who has learned to recognize the more obvious examples from Macaulay will subsequently read with greater pleasure passages, for example, from *Joan of Arc*, where, in speaking of the tortured and the torturer, DeQuincey says:

> Both sank together into sleep, together both kindled into dreams.

And later, apostrophizing the Bishop of Beauvois, he asks:

> My lord, have you no counsel? "Counsel I have none: in heaven above, or on earth beneath, counselor there is none now that would take a brief from me."

Joel Barlow, in *The Vision of Columbus*, has General Washington urge his soldiers to battle with these words:

> Rise, then, to war; to noble vengeance rise.

Chiastic order suggests the sentence of parallel constructions such as is found in *The Lady of the Lake*, where the Highlander is described as

> Owning no tie but to his clan,
> No oath but by his chieftain's hand,
> No law but Roderick Dhu's command.

Children will enjoy attempting to write such lines. A ten-year-old boy gave the following imitative sentence: "Wyoming has no hills that are not high; no rivers that are not swift; no plains that are not fertile." The recognition and the writing of balanced or partially balanced sentences correlate very easily with the child's study of grammar and add some interest and vitality to a subject the value of which is sometimes questioned.

Figures of speech are common, commoner than we realize. Much of our slang has been called merely "fossilized poetry," "fossilized figures of speech." "You're the limit" is merely a metaphor from mathematics. Good figures, however, are rare. The child in his eighth grade should be introduced to the best similes and metaphors which his reading affords, although he should

not learn them under their specific names; he should call them merely figures of speech. To analyze such minutely is beyond the young student, and probably adds little to the pleasure of any reader or to the skill of any writer. In figures of speech, *Sohrab and Rustum* is perhaps the finest and richest of the simpler narrative poems. Some of the figures are a little obscure and need real study. This study should make two things clear: First, what two things are said to be alike; second, in what respect they are alike.

> And he saw that Youth,
> Of age and looks to be his own dear son,
> Piteous and lovely, lying on the sand,
> Like some rich hyacinth which by the scythe
> Of an unskilled gardener has been cut,
> Mowing the garden grass-plots near its bed,
> And lies, a fragrant tower of purple bloom,
> On the mown, dying grass—so Sohrab lay,
> Lovely in death, upon the common sand.

The result of the child's study of the figure might be graphed as follows:

Sohrab——————————Hyacinth.
Loveliness.
Accidental Death.

So might we graph the following:

> From their black tents, long files of horse, they stream'd;
> As when some grey November morn the files,
> In marching order spread, of long-necked cranes
> Stream over Casbin and the southern slopes
> Of Elburz, from the Aralian estuaries,
> Or some frore Caspian reed-bed, southward bound
> For the warm Persian sea-board—so they streamed.

Horsemen——————————Cranes.
Order of March.

Such a simple study of figures will give real pleasure to the child, and help him really to appreciate the author's daring imagination. A more detailed analytical study will probably result disastrously.

Vividness in writing depends upon making suggestions or appeals to as many senses as possible. "A beautiful book" is not pictorial, for nothing *definite* has been said. "A book, red-bound and

gilt-edged," is pictorial, for definite qualities have been introduced. The more senses that can receive appeals, the more certain, the more rich, will be the reader's impression. In simple poems such as *Horatius*, children will very easily pick out the sensory appeals. They will delight in the color, form, light and shade, that the eye tells them; in motion, sound, taste, smell, and the allied senses of touch, temperature, and weight. Such a stanza as the following is easy to analyze, for it is rich in sound, motion, light, and shade:

> And nearer fast and nearer,
> Doth the red whirlwind come;
> And louder still and still more loud,
> From underneath that rolling cloud,
> Is heard the trumpet's war-note proud,
> The trampling, and the hum.
> And plainly and more plainly
> Now through the gloom appears,
> Far to left and far to right,
> In broken gleams of dark-blue light,
> The long array of helmets bright,
> The long array of spears.

Equally rich is *Sohrab and Rustum*. Its first eleven lines suggest color, motion, sound, light and shade, and temperature. In literature for maturer minds these appeals are no less frequent. *The Ancient Mariner* is full of them, especially full of delightful sounds:

> It ceased; yet still the sails made on
> A pleasant noise till noon,
> A noise like of a hidden brook
> In the leafy month of June,
> That to the sleeping woods all night
> Singeth a quiet tune.

The search for sensory suggestions interests a child immensely, sharpens his observation, and helps him to be consciously pictorial in his own expression.

Alliteration to be sure, is a figure much over-used by the unskilled and the amateur. It is, however, an interesting figure when used with reserve and used upon pleasant letters. Alliterations in *s* are usually as unpleasant as they are common, but those in

l, v, f, and the like add much to the music of the lines. *The Lays of Ancient Rome* are full of alliterated words, more or less pleasant but in this respect, perhaps, the richest poem for eighth-grade study is *The Lady of the Lake*, where to the childish ear, at least, the alliterations are delightful.

The foregoing literary devices are easily comprehended and imitated by the pupil in his eighth year of school. In the ninth year he should go a step farther. Here we should begin to train his literary judgment and his critical faculties in the simpler, more obvious points. Here the pupil should learn a little of the psychology of sound values. Long *o* is the voice of pain. It is a word we use in our groanings. It is the cry of the soul's agony as well as of the body's torture. We find it in most of our words of unhappiness: sorrow, loneliness, woe, moan, agony, groan, doleful, alone, and others. Griefs do not flit into the mind and slip out again; they pass very slowly over it, and only with effort do we sometimes cast them out; hence we rarely use the short and quickened sounds of vowels to express the long and slowly moving thought. Whenever our words of torture have not the long *o*, they usually have a lengthened *a* or *e*, as in "pain," "grief," or "bereavement." Mr. Alexander in his *Pot of Basil* dressed Isabella in a flowing robe of long lines which curl around her feet and lose their ends in the folds of her garment. Grief is long and unending; here in art its character is perfectly portrayed. In literature that same characteristic is reproduced by the lengthened, drawn-out vowels. The value of the moaning *m, n;* the quieting *l* and other consonants the child in his ninth year of English can learn to enjoy. The imitative sounds of nature he will easily recognize almost unaided. Subsequently his own sketches may begin to show words chosen for their sound as well as for their content.

In this year a student may well have his attention called to anachronism, an entirely proper figure of speech. He should learn, however, the difference between a pardonable and an unpardonable perversion of time. In *Julius Caesar*, the striking of the clock is effective; to few of us does it seem anachronistic, because the human race has for so many centuries been accustomed to it. Clocks were invented so many years ago that they seem almost to

have been since time began. Very bad indeed would be an anachronistic passage telling how Brutus and Cassius fled from Rome in an automobile; for cars are so new that we all are conscious of their invention. Quite pardonable on the other hand is Mazeppa's speech in which he says:

> There are ten thousand tones and signs
> We hear and see, but none defines—
> Involuntary sparks of thought,
> Which strike from out the heart o'erwrought
> And form a strange intelligence
> Alike mysterious and intense,
> Which link the burning chain that binds,
> Without their will, young hearts and minds;
> Conveying, as the electric wire,
> We know not how, the absorbing fire.

Though electricity was not known for half a century after Mazeppa's death, it is so old, so common, to us all that there seems nothing amiss with the figure. Good literature is full of good anachronisms. Scott's stories, full of heraldric devices too late or too early for the times in which they are placed, are yet true to the spirit of history, for therein no foolish king is ever represented as wise; and no unworthy courtier is ever portrayed as worthy. Less anachronistic than Scott, Bulwer Lytton is yet less powerful, for he, in plays like *Richelieu*, perverted history to suit his own whims, making of this rather powerful cardinal the "most vain-glorious and intolerable braggart" in literature. Whether an author is true or false to history, the ninth-grade students will scarcely be able to discuss unaided; but they should be warned thereafter against accepting as authoritative all so-called historical novels. Without difficulty however, they can learn to recognize good and bad anachronistic details.

While we are training the pupil's critical judgment in these more simple and obvious matters, we must not fail to teach him the difference between accidental, unnecessary, ignorant, misstatement, and the intentional, necessary perversion of facts. In a magazine story not long ago, the hero in going from New York to South America stopped in Australia. For purposes of the plot, the hero had to stop in that island while he was enroute somewhere;

but there was no reason why the author should have selected South America as the destination of his trip when everyone knows that the voyage from New York to South America does not embrace Australia. On the other hand, Dickens' *Child's Dream of a Star* is founded upon an altogether impossible astronomic condition. Without that perversion of truth, however, the story could not have been told, and it is worth the telling. Surely there is needed no other justification for an author's freedom with facts.

Very little in high school should be done with the study of technique; yet there are two technical expressions from the drama which are so commonly used in life that children ought early to learn their meaning and their application. These words are "crisis" and "catastrophe." The study of one play, such as *Julius Caesar*, should enrich the pupil's vocabulary by these terms. Few other matters of technique should be presented to a ninth-year class. While we are teaching children of any grade to watch for literary devices and to weigh with judgment the simpler matters of good workmanship, we must never forget that the greatest of all things in the teaching of literature is the training of the child to find the motive which actuates each character. Not only should the pupils see the remote, general motive which influences Cassius, for instance, throughout the whole play, but they should see the immediate specific motives for each speech. The study of human actions is profitable and fascinating for us all. A sympathetic understanding of mankind is by all odds the greatest thing which literature ever yields to the reader. Yet in the eighth or ninth years of a child's life in school, his attention should be called to the devices suggested above: appreciation of any art is so largely intellectual that without some elementary study of the construction of literature, and some imitative practice therein, few of us would learn to love the classics.